

2026 Election Manifesto

Creating conditions for hospitality businesses, workers and communities to thrive.

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introduction

Hospitality is one of Aotearoa New Zealand's largest employers, one of the most visible and people-focused industries, a cornerstone of our visitor economy and an essential part of every community.

The industry generates more than **\$16 billion** in annual sales, supports over **146,000 jobs** and includes more than **20,000 businesses** nationwide. It underpins tourism, events and regional development, while supporting Aotearoa's wider food and beverage sector. It creates opportunities for business ownership, employment and career development across Aotearoa. With the right policy settings, the Restaurant Association forecasts the industry could grow to more than \$21 billion in annual sales and support around 158,000 jobs by 2030.

Important progress is being made. The establishment of a dedicated Minister for Tourism and Hospitality, the Hospitality Summits held in 2024 and 2026, the Tourism Growth Roadmap, and the release of the Tourism Policy Statement are all recent examples of how strengthened collaboration between Government and industry can elevate hospitality's role within the country's economic and tourism agenda.

Now is the time to build on our progress. Government has an important role to play by creating practical policy settings for hospitality that encourage investment, support workforce development, reduce unnecessary barriers to business, strengthen tourism and help communities thrive. Getting these settings right will give hospitality businesses the confidence to invest and grow, further strengthening their contribution to Aotearoa.

introduction

built on industry experience

The Restaurant Association works alongside more than 2,500 hospitality businesses across Aotearoa every day. That gives us a unique understanding of the opportunities and challenges facing the sector, from the day-to-day realities of running a business through to the long-term issues shaping hospitality's future.

Our recommendations are informed by thousands of conversations with hospitality businesses, insights from our employment and legal advisory services, industry research, regional activity and business capability programmes, as well as our work with Government, tourism agencies and other industry organisations.

While the Restaurant Association will continue leading initiatives that strengthen the hospitality sector, this manifesto focuses on the areas where Government and industry working together can have the greatest impact.

Restaurant Association Priorities at a Glance

Government Partnership

Retain a dedicated **Minister for Tourism and Hospitality** and strengthen the partnership between Government and industry.

Workforce & Skills

Strengthen Aotearoa's **hospitality workforce** through education pathways, training and responsive immigration settings.

Small Business Regulation

Modernise hospitality regulation to reduce unnecessary complexity and support business growth.

Business Capability & Innovation

Support businesses to **adopt new technology**, improve productivity and capability through targeted investment and support.

Hospitality & Tourism

Position hospitality as a **core part of Aotearoa's visitor economy** and international reputation.

Safe & Vibrant Town Centres

Support **safe, vibrant town centres** where hospitality businesses, workers and communities can flourish.

priority 1

government partnership

A strong partnership between Government and industry creates more effective policy and stronger outcomes.

The establishment of a dedicated Minister for Tourism and Hospitality marked an important milestone for the hospitality sector. For the first time, hospitality has had a voice within Government to champion the industry's interests and ensure hospitality is considered in wider Government decision-making. It has also created opportunities for more coordinated policy development across Government. Since the first Hospitality Summit in 2024, more than 20 industry recommendations have already been progressed or implemented, demonstrating the value of structured collaboration between Government and industry.

The Restaurant Association believes retaining this portfolio will ensure this momentum continues.

However, leadership alone is not enough. Hospitality is a fast-moving industry with unique operating challenges and opportunities, making regular engagement between Government and industry essential. The Restaurant Association plays a key role in that partnership, bringing experience and insights into the day-to-day realities of hospitality operations and helping to ensure policy development reflects how hospitality businesses actually operate. We stand ready to continue working alongside Government—seeing this as the strongest way to deliver better outcomes.

priority 1 government partnership



Our vision

Hospitality has a permanent and influential place within Government decision-making, supported by strong leadership and genuine partnership with industry.



What we need from Government

- **Retain a dedicated Minister** for Tourism and Hospitality.
- **Commit to a biennial Hospitality Summit** as the primary forum for Government and industry collaboration.



- **Continue delivering Government and industry work programmes**, including the Tourism Policy Statement implementation.
- **Develop and implement a long-term hospitality workforce strategy** in partnership with industry.
- **Recognise industry organisations as delivery partners** when developing and delivering policy.

priority 2

workforce & skills

A strong hospitality workforce starts with clear career pathways, practical education and immigration settings that support business needs.

People are hospitality's greatest strength. Every memorable visitor experience and every successful hospitality business depends on skilled people choosing hospitality as a career.

To help build the skilled workforce our industry needs, the Restaurant Association supports the ongoing reform of secondary and vocational education and wants to see hospitality recognised as a priority sector, with clear and accessible routes from school into vocational education and employment. The establishment of Industry Skills Boards also creates an opportunity for hospitality to help shape qualifications that reflect the needs of modern hospitality businesses.

However, while long-term investment in local talent is critical, experienced international workers play a valuable role in the industry. Responsive immigration settings remain an important part of the workforce mix, as many businesses continue to face shortages of experienced chefs, managers and specialist staff.

Getting workforce settings right will help businesses grow and ensure the industry has the skilled workforce needed to support its future growth.

priority 2 workforce & skills



Our vision

A thriving hospitality industry that creates more opportunities for New Zealanders to choose hospitality and build long-term careers in the industry.



What we need from Government

- **Develop the new hospitality subject for secondary school** in partnership with industry to ensure it reflects modern hospitality careers and employer needs.
- **Co-design vocational education and work-based learning improvements** in partnership with industry.



- **Ensure immigration settings support hospitality's workforce needs** by recognising genuine skill shortages and providing clear pathways for skilled workers and international graduates to remain in New Zealand.
- **Support industry-led workforce development**, including practical training and stronger pathways from education into employment.

priority 3

hospitality & tourism

Hospitality is at the heart of the visitor experience — recognising that creates stronger tourism outcomes for the whole country.

Hospitality is one of Aotearoa's greatest tourism assets. Food and dining experiences are a major driver of visitor spending and destination reputation, shaping how visitors remember Aotearoa and whether they return and recommend us to others. Tourism New Zealand research shows that trying local cuisine is the number one activity for more than 85% of potential visitors across our key international markets, highlighting the central role hospitality plays in attracting international visitors.

Recent developments have created an opportunity to elevate Aotearoa's reputation. The arrival of the MICHELIN Guide marks a significant milestone for New Zealand's visitor economy, with an estimated 36,000 additional international visitors and \$185 million in visitor spend forecast per annum as a result. Having successfully secured the Guide, the focus must now be on maintaining this partnership and maximising the long-term benefits for hospitality businesses, regions and the wider visitor economy.

The Tourism Policy Statement recognises hospitality's contribution, while Tourism New Zealand's growing focus on food tourism reflects the increasing role hospitality plays, and recent initiatives such as Tourism Boost, which explicitly includes hospitality as part of its visitor offering, also demonstrate the value of integrating hospitality into tourism programmes and campaigns.

The Restaurant Association welcomes this direction and believes Government, Tourism New Zealand, regional tourism organisations and industry must continue working together so hospitality is recognised not simply as a service that supports tourism, but as one of the reasons visitors choose Aotearoa in the first place.

priority 3 hospitality & tourism



Our vision

Hospitality is recognised as a core driver of Aotearoa's visitor economy, helping attract visitors, strengthen regional economies and showcase the country's food, people and culture.



What we need from Government

- Position hospitality as a core part of Aotearoa's tourism strategy.
- Develop a national culinary brand for Aotearoa.



- Maintain and build on the MICHELIN Guide partnership to maximise long-term benefits across New Zealand's hospitality sector.
- Invest in regional destination development that showcases Aotearoa's unique food and hospitality experiences.

priority 4 small business regulation

Responsive regulation gives hospitality businesses more time to focus on customers, staff and growing their businesses.

Most hospitality businesses are small businesses, run by owners who are closely involved in the day-to-day operation of their business. Typically operating on margins of just 4–7 per cent, operators and their teams work hard to meet high standards while navigating a complex regulatory environment spanning food safety, health and safety, alcohol licensing, employment, local government, immigration and business regulation.

High standards are important and are a key part of maintaining trust in our industry, but regulation should also be practical, proportionate and nationally consistent.

For instance, businesses should not be required to provide the same information to multiple agencies, or navigate different interpretations of the same rules depending on where they operate. Regulatory processes should also recognise business performance and different levels of risk, rewarding businesses with a strong compliance history rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach.

The Restaurant Association welcomed the Government's Hospitality Sector Review, following several years of advocating for a comprehensive review of hospitality regulation.



It provides an important opportunity to address long-standing industry concerns and modernise the way regulation is designed and delivered so it better reflects the realities of today's hospitality businesses. The Association also welcomes recent reforms to alcohol legislation, many of which reflect recommendations developed through the Hospitality Summit.

These are positive steps, but further work is needed. Alongside regulatory reform, Government should continue to support industry-led initiatives that help businesses meet and exceed regulatory requirements, recognising that education, accreditation and support are often more effective than compliance alone.

priority 4 small business regulation



Our vision

A regulatory environment that maintains high standards while reducing unnecessary complexity and supporting business growth.

What we need from Government

- **Continue implementing the Hospitality Sector Review recommendations** to modernise hospitality regulation.
- **Introduce a small business test for new regulation**, using a proportionate, risk-based approach.
- **Modernise licensing, compliance and regulatory systems** to reduce unnecessary complexity.
- **Standardise how regulations are interpreted and applied** across councils and agencies.
- **Partner with industry to deliver accreditation and business assurance programmes**, including HospoCred.
- **Ensure alcohol policy and licensing recognise hospitality's distinct role** through nationally consistent, risk-based settings that reward strong compliance while maintaining positive community outcomes.

priority 5 innovation & business capability

Helping hospitality businesses build capability, adopt new technology and improve productivity will strengthen the industry's long-term success and our contribution to the economy.

The Restaurant Association believes building business capability is one of the most effective ways to improve productivity, strengthen business resilience and support long-term growth.

In hospitality, new technologies, including artificial intelligence, automation and digital systems, are creating opportunities to improve productivity while enhancing the customer experience. For many hospitality businesses, however, adopting new technology isn't simply a question of willingness. MBIE research shows almost half of New Zealand businesses are less digitally enabled than they could be because of cost and value-for-money concerns, while lack of time and knowledge remain significant barriers to adoption. Operators often need practical, industry-specific support to evaluate and implement new solutions.



Government can help address these barriers by partnering with industry to deliver targeted capability programmes, improve access to expert advice and investment, and ensure hospitality businesses are included within wider business innovation initiatives.



Our vision

Hospitality businesses have the capability, tools and support to innovate, improve productivity and grow.

What we need from Government

- **Name hospitality as a priority sector** within Government business capability and innovation programmes.
- **Partner with industry to design and deliver** business capability, leadership and digital adoption programmes.
- **Fund a digital adoption grant** for hospitality SMEs.

priority 6 safe & vibrant town centres

Hospitality helps bring our town centres to life. Safe, welcoming communities allow businesses, residents and visitors to thrive together.

Hospitality helps shape the places where people live, work and visit. Cafés, restaurants, bars and other hospitality businesses provide places where people gather, support local economies and bring life to town centres and neighbourhoods across Aotearoa.

As a key part of Aotearoa's night-time economy, hospitality should be central to decisions about how our town centres are planned, supported and activated after dark. While regional plans are beginning to emerge, a National Night-Time Economy Strategy would provide a coordinated national framework for planning, investment and policy.

Realising these opportunities also depends on staff and customers feeling safe and welcome. However, in recent years, many hospitality businesses have experienced increasing challenges, with more than a third of operators surveyed through a 2026 Restaurant Association poll indicating that their business had experienced crime in the previous six months.



This includes anti-social behaviour around business premises, theft and staff harassment. If these challenges are not addressed, they risk undermining the vibrancy of our town centres, discouraging people from spending time in our hospitality precincts and weakening Aotearoa's reputation as a safe and welcoming destination.

Creating safe and vibrant town centres is a shared responsibility. By working together, Government, councils, Police and industry can create places where hospitality businesses, communities and visitors all thrive.



Our vision

Hospitality businesses operate in safe, welcoming communities with vibrant town centres and a thriving night-time economy.

What we need from Government

- **Develop a national Night-Time Economy Strategy.**
- **Strengthen coordination** between Government, councils, Police and industry to deliver safer and more vibrant hospitality precincts.
- **Support local investment in town centre activation,** transport and public safety initiatives.

about the restaurant association of new zealand

The Restaurant Association of New Zealand is the country's leading hospitality industry body, representing more than 2,500 hospitality businesses across Aotearoa. We are committed to helping hospitality businesses succeed and ensuring the sector continues to make a positive contribution to Aotearoa.

We work alongside members, Government and industry partners to strengthen hospitality through effective business support, workforce development, research, advocacy and industry leadership.

Our role is to ensure hospitality businesses have the support they need to succeed, while advocating for policies that enable the sector to continue contributing to Aotearoa's economy, communities and visitor experience.

For any enquiries regarding this manifesto contact the Restaurant Association.

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the link between good food and good business

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